

Howard County Council introduces amendments to APFO



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The Howard County Council introduced more than 20 amendment drafts to the adequate public facilities legislation during its Monday work session.

County Executive Allan Kittleman and council members Calvin Ball, **Jon Weinstein**, Jen Terrasa and Mary Kay Sigaty introduced their own amendments to the bills commonly known as APFO, which aim to ensure the county's public infrastructure resources — including roads, water and sewer management and schools — keep pace with an increase in population.

The need for possible amendments to the legislation has been discussed for some time by county officials, and Monday was the first chance for residents to understand what changes to the bills could look like.

“What are the citizens asking for, what can pass and what makes sense?” Ball said.

Notable changes were proposed in relation to schools and the county's school capacity test, which determines whether a designated area in the county is open to housing development. An area is “closed” to development if the elementary and middle schools in the region are over 115 percent of capacity utilization; high schools are not currently included in the test.

Three separate amendments were introduced by Ball, Terrasa and **Weinstein** regarding the school capacity test, all three of which included adding high schools as a tier.

The three council members each also included amendments to change the maximum capacity utilization of a school before it is closed to development. Terrasa's amendment proposed lowering the utilization cap to 100 percent, while Ball's amendment set it at 105 percent when regional capacity is at least 100 percent. Weinstein lowered the capacity to 110 percent for elementary and middle schools, and set it at 120 percent at the proposed high school level.

Board of Education Chairwoman Cindy Vaillancourt, who appeared at the work session with board member Christina Delmont-Small, brought up the point that the board and the council share responsibility for ensuring schools do not become overcrowded, and that the board is limited in how it can mitigate the problem without control of the school system's budget to fund new projects, even if it determines new construction is needed.

"We're not trying to point the finger at you all," Vaillancourt said. "We do what we can."

Ball and Terrasa also collaborated on an amendment to stipulate that an APFO Review Committee meet within five years of a comprehensive general plan revision for the county, and Weinstein introduced an amendment that would require the committee to convene within four months of the same revision.

The council asked Jeff Bronow, chief of the Department of Planning and Zoning's research division, for his input over the next week in how quickly an APFO task force should meet after a general plan revision, which aims to guide the county's economic, environmental and development future.

When the most recent task force began meeting in 2015, it was the first time in nearly a decade that the county's APFO legislation had been reviewed.

“There needs to be a more frequent review of APFO; what does that look like and what’s the time frame that makes the most sense is where we need to tweak and get to a consensus,” Ball said.

The council has just under two weeks to continue to discuss and re-draft any amendments to the APFO legislation, and then it will vote on the bills at its Nov. 6 legislative session.